

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Map-Master program reduces cost of presentation graphics

Most graphic artists take hours or days to prepare sales-related maps for slide presentations. It's now possible to do much of this work in minutes — using your trusty personal computer.

The time and labor savings using a personal computer could be considerable — especially for large companies that prepare professional-looking slide presentations all the time. In fact, computer-assisted map-drawing programs are so efficient that many graphic artists are now learning computer skills.

Until recently, only mainframe or mini-computer map-drawing programs were available. They cost thousands of dollars and required extensive operator training to use effectively. But now programs are being introduced for personal computers that do many of the same tasks with minimal training.

The best one I've seen prepares all types of maps, in all types of formats and colors, with any captions or headings you can imagine. It's called Map-Master from Decision Resources of Westport, Conn. The program is designed for the IBM PC and PC-compatible computers, and works best with a hard disk, 512 Kilobytes of memory and a high-resolution color monitor. List price is \$395; the program can be ordered through most local computer stores.

Detailed output in a jiffy. The striking advantage of this particular program is that it includes predrawn maps for virtually any region you can think of. These are stored on floppy disks that come with it. Additional floppy disks with vital statistics for population, median age, income, and retail sales are available from Decision Resources.

You can highlight cities, counties or regions, add your own sales or other relevant data manually, or input data from Lotus 1-2-3 spread sheets or other data bases. With relative ease, you can add captions, choose colors, and blow up or reduce the size of images on the screen.

also necessary. Here are the steps necessary to complete this slide with the Map-Master program:

- ✓ Load the program by typing MM for Map-Master.
- ✓ Name the new map and specify U.S.
- ✓ After the map is drawn on

your screen with a list of states, indicate which states are to be in each region.

✓ Enter the sales figures to be shown.

✓ Add the headlines, captions and colors.

✓ Show the finished slide on your screen.

Up to this point, assuming the operator is not learning to use the program for the first time, in which case it will take longer, the entire process might only have taken *10 minutes*. After all the screens for the various slides being prepared are completed, they can then be called up one by one and photographed, which might take another three to five minutes each.

Obviously, this is only a small fraction of the time necessary for an artist to do the work manually.

It's not for everyone. My suspicion is that the people who could make the best use of the program are the very same ones who now prepare the slides — commercial artists, in-house art directors, paste-up people and photographers. Because they design and prepare slides all the time, they know how to make them look professional.

Given this new tool, the best artists will rush to make use of it. They'll delight in being more productive, increasing their profit margins and saving money for their clients.

The biggest drawback of Map-Master is something that's not the fault of the program, but rather how it may be used in some business offices. Because of its relatively low price and ease of use, some executives, managers and secretaries might be tempted to try their creative hand preparing their own slides.



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ages on the screen.

Then, when your composition is complete, the screen can either be photographed directly or printed with a color printer or plotter. I rarely recommend the purchase of expensive color printers or plotters because the photographic approach is usually adequate. An amazing device called the Polaroid Palette (which I'll describe more fully in a future column) permits you to make color slides of your computer's screen image in minutes.

A sales-related example. Let's say you're preparing a presentation for management. A slide is needed that shows a map of the United States with each of your company's sales regions highlighted in a different color. Next to each section is needed the sales manager's name and the sales numbers for last month. Finally, several headlines are

Unfortunately, they'll probably waste a lot of time learning to use the program — even though it's easy to learn, it still takes time to become proficient — and the result will probably appear amateurish. Regardless of the capability of the program, it still cannot make up for the operator's lack of basic design skills.

The bottom line: Map-Master is an excellent tool for commercial artists and in-house art departments. It will pay for itself many times over if used regularly. However, even though its capability is impressive, design skill is still required to create the quality of slides that are ordinarily shown in corporate boardrooms.

Three companion products are also available from Decision Resources, which I'll review them in future columns.

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